

The University of Maine

DigitalCommons@UMaine

General University of Maine Publications

University of Maine Publications

9-6-1996

Easy Reading is Hard Work

Kay Hyatt

College of Education, University of Maine

Follow this and additional works at: https://digitalcommons.library.umaine.edu/univ_publications



Part of the [Higher Education Commons](#), and the [History Commons](#)

Repository Citation

Hyatt, Kay, "Easy Reading is Hard Work" (1996). *General University of Maine Publications*. 1796.
https://digitalcommons.library.umaine.edu/univ_publications/1796

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by DigitalCommons@UMaine. It has been accepted for inclusion in General University of Maine Publications by an authorized administrator of DigitalCommons@UMaine. For more information, please contact um.library.technical.services@maine.edu.

THE COLLEGE OF EDUCATION

In the Spotlight

UNIVERSITY OF MAINE

Easy Reading Is Hard Work

ORONO, Maine -- Think those books the teacher is sending home with your kindergarten or first grade child are too easy? Before jumping to that conclusion, parents should understand that "easy" reading is a powerful learning technique, says a University of Maine literacy expert.

"Our culture seems to think that if reading isn't hard, then the child isn't learning," says Paula Moore, director of the Center for Early Literacy at UMaine's College of Education. Even when there's seemingly little effort, young children are doing plenty of work, according to Moore. They are working hard at one of the most important aspects of learning to read - practicing visual and motor coordination.

For the young reader, "easy" reading is being accurate, fluent and phrased, like a reader's voice, Moore explains. If they're struggling with words and reading in a disjointed, staccato way, the book is too hard. Children who are building solid reading skills should be able to read increasing more difficult texts with ease, she says.

Learning how to read words is like learning how to read music and move your hands to play the piano, or like watching a tennis ball and moving the racquet to meet it, or like watching on-coming traffic and shifting gears, Moore points out.

"All these activities - reading, playing the piano, playing tennis or driving - are complex skills requiring visual, cognitive and motor coordination and integration. These skills take effort and practice to achieve, but as adults who perform such tasks automatically, it's difficult to remember how we learned to do them," she says.

Here's a lesson in just how complex it is to learn to read.

- Children first must practice the early skills of coordinating motor movement, eye movement, and reading out loud.
- Then they need to learn more about how letters and letter clusters, words, stories, punctuation marks, rules of grammar, story plot, and other sources of information in print relate and are redundant.
- Every complex function requires sub-routines of action, followed by the process of putting them into a coordinated whole. For example, young children learning to read aloud must visually track the words and make their speech match.
- When allowed to read a familiar book a second or third time, a novice reader has more access to the redundant features of the text, and that's good practice.

- Because the story is familiar, the young child has more cognitive capacity to pay attention to novel features in the text such as punctuation, and that's new learning.
- Children and adults learn exponentially. The more words a child recognizes immediately, the more capacity and attention he or she has to learn new words.

Reading easy, familiar books is more effective than the old flash card drills many adults endured because it provides not only repetition of words, but words within a meaningful context which provides motivation to practice, according to Moore.

As young readers gain more skill, parents should expect to see them bringing home increasingly more difficult books, but still continuing to find reading easy. If this is happening, then the teacher is providing the child with opportunities to learn about new features in more complex books with guidance and support. And if parents allow and encourage their children to read "easy" books with them at home, they are providing opportunities to practice this developing coordination and integration of more and more complex information.

Moore has some easy advice for parents:

- Don't worry about reading material being too easy. Remember that reading a book over and over provides the same function as drills, but without a bottleneck vision of learning.
- Don't worry that your child is memorizing instead of learning to read. Memorization is an important coordination function. Just make sure the child is looking at the book and following the words.
- Help your child focus on the meaning and flow of the story in order to anticipate what should come next. If a child has difficulty with a word, ask "what would make sense here?" Let him or her use higher-level skills to envision and predict, then together, check the word to see if it also looks and sounds right.
- Approach reading as an enjoyable, exciting experience. Encourage children to bring home new, easy books and to share the stories with you.
- Remember that young children teach themselves a lot about language; they don't have to be taught everything about the printed word, but they do need the opportunity and encouragement to practice what they are learning.
- Check with the teacher frequently to make sure your child is keeping up with the school's expectations for young reader development.

Released: Sept. 6, 1996

Contact: Kay Hyatt, (207) 581-2761



[Back to the College of Education Home Page](#)

[Back to Recent Press Releases](#)



©This is an official publication of the University of Maine. If you have questions or comments, please contact the [Web Master](#).